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Dr. NORMAN BETHUNE

The crime on the road Malaga-Almeria

PUBLICACIONES IBERIA



B143 penae wire
Dr. NORMAN BETHUNE

*The crime on the road
Malaga-Almeria*

Narrative with graphic documents
revealing fascist cruelty

PHOTOS HAZEN SISE

PUBLICACIONES IBERIA



Dr. Bethune and his comrades Hazen Sise and Thomas Worsley

INTRODUCTION

Most of the people, crazed by panic and desperation, took the road to Motril and Almería. A whole town in flight. They fled from Malaga; which had just been occupied by the legions of Italians and Germans, by Moors and the Tercio.

On the right of the road open to the sea, the guns of the pirate ships were pouring out fire, seconded by the units of the German and Italian squadrons. Beneath the explosion of grenades, which sowed death, there opened in the human torrent which advanced unceasingly, tragic gaps: hundreds of women, men, old people and children, fell, never to rise again, horribly hit. From the sky, of a passive blue, the aeroplanes swooped down—also German and Italian—and sowed with the lead of their machine-guns, death wherever they pleased.

On the left of the road, the scarps of the Sierra Nevada cut off all hope of escape for those who fled. From sky and sea the cold breath of death extinguished thousands of lives. Under the noise of exploding shells and the rattle of machine guns from the aero-



Helping the refugees to get into the ambulance

planes, the multitude continued their hasty march, their career of desperation and infinite anguish. Their goal was still very distant and they had no means of shortening it.

Very soon—it was the day of the 10 of February—an ambulance, painted grey, attempted to open a way, in the opposite direction to that of the tumultuous human torrent. To the right and left of the road, hundreds of wounded, children calling in vain for their parents, and fainting women, with feet horribly swollen and bleeding from the long tramp, tormented

by hunger and thirst, had fallen completely overcome. Others fell dead. The ambulance carried on its sides the following inscription: «Permanent service of blood transfusion». On the front seat, dressed in blue overalls were three men: the Canadian doctor, Norman Bethune, his assistant Hazen Sise and the driver, also Canadians. These three men were among the first to go to the aid of the sick, children, women and wounded, who fled from Malaga and the villages on the way from that capital to Almería, impelled by the terror of fascist domination. Three heroes, three magnificent figures of human solidarity. For seven days these men confronted dangers of every kind, suffered hunger and thirst and saved from certain death hundreds of women and children, whom they carried in their ambulance from the fascist lines to Almería. The names of Dr. Norman Bethune and his collaborators, in this work of unexampled unselfishness and sacrifice, deserve to be perpetuated, with a cult of devotion and affec-



Dr. Bethune, chief of the sanitary expedition

tionate admiration, in the memories of all the honourable consciences in the world. It is not a question of some combatants: it is a question of three personalities of the highest moral calibre, who possess above everything else a deep and austere feeling of sacrifice for their kind. The descriptions which are published in this pamphlet are from the honoured pen of the eminent Dr. Norman Bethune, on the subject of the terrible march undertaken by the Spaniards of the city of Malaga, the frightened exodus of a whole town, who preferred death a thousand times rather than submit to the criminal tyranny of fascism. Dr. Bethune, with his just and impartial words, will denounce before the world the crime committed—one more and one of the most monstrous—against the Spanish people by the foreign hordes which are fighting to subjugate them under the black tyranny of fascist barbarism.



Dialogue in the streets of Almeria

ALARDO PRATS

NARRATIVE

The evacuation en masse of the civilian population of Malaga started on Sunday Feb. 7. Twentyfive thousand German, Italian and Moorish troops entered the town on Monday morning the eighth. Tanks, submarines, warships, airplanes combined to smash the defenses of the city held by a small heroic band of Spanish troops without tanks, airplanes or support. The so-called Nationalists entered, as they have entered every captured village and city in Spain, what was practically a deserted town.

Now imagine one hundred and fifty thousand men women and children setting out for safety to the town situated over a hundred miles away. There is only one road they can take. There is no other way of escape. This road, bordered on one side by the high Sierra Nevada mountains and on the other by the sea, is cut into the side of the cliffs and climbs up and down from sea-level to over 500 feet. The city they must reach is Almeria, and it is over two hundred kilometers away. A strong, healthy young man can walk on foot forty or fifty kilometers a day. The journey these women children and old people must face will take five days and five nights at least. There will be no food to be found in the villages, no trains, no buses to transport them. They must walk and as they walked they staggered and stumbled with cut, bruised feet along that flint, white road the fascists bombed them from the air and fired at them from their ships at sea.

Now, what I want to tell you is what I saw myself of this forced march—the largest, most terrible evacuation of a city in modern times. We had arrived in Almeria at five oclock on Wednesday the tenth with a refrigeration truckload of preserved blood from Barcelona. Our intention was to proceed to Malaga to give blood trans-

fusions to wounded. In Almeria we heard for the first time that the town had fallen and were warned to go no farther as no one knew where the frontline now was but everyone was sure that the town of Motril had also fallen. We thought it important to proceed and discover how the evacuation of the wounded was proceeding. We set out at six o'clock in the evening along the Malaga road and a few miles on we met the head of the piteous procession. Here were the strong with all their goods on donkeys, mules and horses. We passed them, and the farther we went the more pitiful the sights became. Thousands of children, we counted five thousand under ten years of age, and at least one thousand of them barefoot and many of them clad only in a single garment. They were slung over their mother's shoulders or clung to her hands. Here a father staggered along with two children of one and two years of age on his back in addition to carrying pots and pans or some treasured possession. The incessant stream of people became so dense we could barely force the car through them. At eighty eight kilometers from Almeria they beseeched us to go no farther, that the fascists were just behind. By this time we had passed so many distressed women and children that we thought it best to turn back and start transporting the worst cases to safety.

It was difficult to choose which to take. Our car was besieged by a mob of frantic mothers and fathers who with tired outstretched arms held up to us their children, their eyes and faces swollen and congested by four days of sun and dust.

«Take this one.» «See this child.» «This one is wounded.» Children with bloodstained rags wrapped around their arms and legs, children without shoes, their feet swollen to twice their size crying helplessly from pain, hunger and fatigue. Two hundred kilometers of misery. Imagine four days and four nights, hiding by day in the hills as the fascist barbarians pursued them by plane, walking by night

packed in a solid stream men, women, children, mules, donkeys, goats, crying out the names of their separated relatives, lost in the mob. How could we chose between taking a child dying of disentry or a mother silently watching us with great sunken eyes carrying against her open breast her child born on the road two days ago. She had stopped walking for ten hours only. Here was a woman of sixty unable to stagger another step, her gigantic swollen legs with their open varicose ulcers bleeding into her cut linen sandals. Many old people simply gave up the struggle, lay down by the side of the road and waited for death.

We first decided to take only children and mothers. Then the separation between father and child, husband and wife became too cruel to bear. We finished by transporting families with the largest number of young children and the solitary children of which there were hundreds without parents. We carried thirty to forty people a trip for the next three days and nights back to Almeria to the hospital of the Socorro Rojo International where they received medical attention, food and clothing. The tireless devotion of Hazen Sise and Thomas Worsley, drivers of the truck, saved many lives. In turn they drove back and forth day and night sleeping out on the open road between shifts with no food except dry bread and oranges.

And now comes the final barbarism. Not content with bombing and shelling this procession of unarmed peasants on this long road, but on the evening of the 12th when the little seaport of Almeria was completely filled with refugees, its population swollen to double its size, when forty thousand exhausted people had reached a haven of what they thought was safety, we were heavily bombed by German and Italian fascist airplanes. The siren alarm sounded thirty seconds before the first bomb fell. These planes made no effort to hit the government battleship in the harbor or bomb the barracks. They deliberately

dropped ten great bombs in the very center of the town where on the main street were sleeping huddled together on the pavement so closely that a car could pass only with difficulty, the exhausted refugees. After the planes had passed I picked up in my arms three dead children from the pavement in front of the Provincial Committee for the Evacuation of Refugees where they had been standing in a great quene waiting for a cupful of preserved milk and a handful of dry bread, the only food some of them had for days. The street was a shambles of the dead and dying, lit only by the orange glare of burning buildings. In the darkness the moans of the wounded children, shrieks of agonized mothers, the curses of the men rose in a massed cry higher and higher to a pitch of intolerable intensity. One's body felt as heavy as the dead themselves, but empty and hollow, and in one's brain burned a bright flame of hate. That night were murdered fifty civilians and an additional fifty were wounded. There were two soldiers killed.

Now, what was the crime that these unarmed civilians had committed to be murdered in this bloody manner? Their only crime was that they had voted to elect a government of the people, committed to the most moderate alleviation of the crushing burden of centuries of the greed of capitalism. The question has been raised:—why did they not stay in Malaga and await the entrance of the fascists? They knew what would happen to them. They knew what would happen to their men and women as had happened so many times before in other captured towns. Every male between the age of 15 and 60 who could not prove that he had not by force been made to assist the government would immediately be shot. And it is this knowledge that has concentrated two-thirds of the entire population of Spain in one half the country and that still held by the republic.

Dr. NORMAN BETHUNE



Malaga people sadly leave their home town, carrying with them their children and their household goods.



The children rescue what toys they can.



Tiny victims flee for safety.



**The endless procession takes a rest
by the roadside.**



Nothing matters now - not even her doll.



Exhausted by flight family halts for rest.



Hardly able to struggle on.



**Her husband is dead. She must save
her children.**



Waiting for help.



Waiting in vain for a lift.



The endless procession.



The trek to safety still goes on.



They passed by the villages along the road.



«Lunch time» - no bread, no water.



A brief respite in a roadside cottage.



Even children must tramp along.



Sugar cane their only sustenance.



A family rests.



Foot - sore and weary.



Collapsed along the length of the route.



In Almeria, international machine-gunning also pursues fiercely the defenceless inhabitants of Malaga.